

Migratory Bird Report

Dubakella Plantations Insect & Disease Project

Prepared by: Carla De Juilio, Wildlife Biologist
Shasta-Trinity National Forest
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Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Forest Service is directed to “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives.” (P.L. 94-588, Sec 6 (g) (3) (B)). Direction for integrating migratory bird conservation into forest management and planning includes the January 2000 USDA Forest Service (FS) Landbird Conservation Strategic Plan; the Partners in Flight (PIF) Landbird Conservation Plans; the 2001 Executive Order (EO)13186; and the 2017 Department of Interior Solicitor’s Opinion M-37050. Within the National Forests, migratory bird conservation focuses on providing a diversity of bird habitats at multiple spatial and temporal scales over the long-term. Our actions also include promoting migratory bird conservation through enhanced collaboration and cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as other federal, state, tribal and local governments.

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest is proposing to manage lands on the Hayfork and Yolla Bolla Ranger Districts within the Dubakella Plantations Insect & Disease project area (refer to the project DM for details). Proposed management is intended to implement direction contained within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, USDA Forest Service 1995). Opportunities to promote conservation of migratory birds and their habitats in the project area were considered during the development, design and implementation of the project.

Potential effects to federally threatened bird species are analyzed in the wildlife Biological Assessment; there are no known/documented endangered bird species within/near the project assessment area. Potential effects to Forest Service designated Sensitive birds and their habitats are analyzed in the wildlife Biological Evaluation.

Proposed treatments are spread widely across a very large area with variable vegetative conditions ranging from late-successional conifer forest dominated by Douglas fir to young even-aged plantations. Overall, the area contains a variety of habitat types and conditions for migratory bird species. Proposed management actions will help develop or sustain migratory bird habitat. Implementation of the proposed treatments will maintain a diversity of functional habitats for migratory birds over the short and long term, and contribute to long-term sustainability and resilience of migratory bird habitats. The risk of habitat loss due to future large wildfires, insect and/or disease outbreaks will be reduced. Although some actions may have short-term incidental effects on individual birds, there will be no meaningful influence on population trends of any species of migratory bird or adverse effects at the population-level.

Potential effects to individuals and their habitats will be minimized through project design, resource protection measures, adherence to Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, and the Aquatic Conservation Strategy. Resource protection measures (RPMs) and project design features (PDFs) were developed in collaboration with the USFWS. RPMs/PDFs include limited operating periods (LOPs), riparian reserve buffers, equipment exclusion zones, limiting ground disturbance, maintenance of canopy closure, snag/down wood retention, hardwood retention and other measures. Some specific measures that would benefit/protect migratory birds are listed below (see project record for full list of RPMs/PDFs):

1. Limited operating periods (LOPs) will be implemented to avoid potential impacts to northern spotted owls (NSO), northern goshawks, peregrine falcons and bald eagles (these would also reduce potential impacts to migratory birds during their nesting season):
 - a. For northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), starting on February 1 through July 9, all activities that generate loud and continuous noise and/or smoke will be prohibited within 0.25 mile of suitable nesting/roosting and foraging habitat that is occupied or unsurveyed. The LOP will be February 1 through September 15 for all activities directly manipulating nesting/roosting or foraging habitat that is occupied or unsurveyed. Surveys to protocol can be used to generate new breeding activity results. If protocol-level surveys indicate no nesting activity within 0.25 miles of proposed activities at the time of implementation or by mutual agreement with the FWS, these LOPs may be lifted.
 - b. For northern goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*), a limited operating period (LOP) will be imposed from February 1 to August 15 within 0.5 miles of all known goshawk nest sites. This LOP will apply to all activities causing loud and continuous noise disturbance or smoke that will potentially disturb this species during its breeding season. Surveys to protocol can be used to generate new breeding activity results. If subsequent protocol-compliant surveys show no nesting activity within 0.5 miles of proposed activities at the time of implementation, LOPs may be lifted (as appropriate).
 - c. For peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), a limited operating period (LOP) will be imposed from February 1 to August 15 within 0.5 miles of all known peregrine falcon nest sites. This LOP will apply to all activities causing loud and continuous noise disturbance or smoke that will potentially disturb this species during its breeding season. If a peregrine falcon management plan has been written for a specific nesting site, the provisions of the plan will be incorporated into the project design. Surveys to protocol can be used to generate new breeding activity results. If subsequent protocol compliant surveys show no nesting activity within the nest site management zones at the time of implementation, LOPs may be lifted.
 - d. For bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), a limited operating period (LOP) will be imposed from January 1 to August 15 within 0.5 miles of all known bald eagle nest sites. This LOP will apply to all activities causing loud and continuous noise disturbance or smoke that will potentially disturb this species during its breeding season. If a bald eagle management plan has been written for a specific nesting site, the provisions of the plan will be incorporated into the project design. Surveys to protocol can be used to generate new breeding activity results. If subsequent protocol-compliant surveys show no nesting activity within 0.5 miles of proposed activities at the time of implementation, LOPs may be lifted.
2. Retain any existing legacy trees and existing snags greater than 15 inches DBH unless the legacy tree/snag poses a safety hazard for that specific site or the number of snags present on the site exceeds fuel loading recommendations, in which case the largest snags would be retained while meeting the recommended retention levels per the LRMP for the specific land allocation. Any legacy trees or snags greater than 15 inches felled for safety reasons would be left on site as logs.
3. Coarse wood (logs greater than 20 inches diameter and 10 feet long) that is already on the ground will be retained where it will not cause a safety concern for implementation, and protected from disturbance to the greatest extent possible during mechanical treatment activities and prescribed burning. Within NSO nesting/roosting and foraging habitat, large logs will be maintained as feasible, with an average of 6-8 logs per acre (at least 20 inches in diameter and 10 feet long) retained with an average of 10-20 tons/acre of fuel remaining, for protection of habitat and soil fertility.
4. Snags and logs with deformities such as cat faces, broken or forked tops, hollows or cavities will be prioritized for retention.

5. Protect and retain dominant and co-dominant class hardwoods (all treatments) along with healthy intermediate class hardwoods (Riparian Reserves only), as possible where they do not interfere with or cause a hazard to implementation.
6. Prescribed fire will be variable within and between stands, will be distributed over a number of years, and will incorporate project design features that seasonally restrict operations during the NSO nesting season, and that limit the proportion of core areas and home ranges (or "owlsheds," if designated) burned in any one year. Burning will be done to create low to moderate fire behavior (flame lengths two to six feet but generally less than four feet) to meet the desired habitat restoration objectives, however flare ups and higher flame lengths and fire intensity may occur where there are higher fuel concentrations of small ladder fuels or down wood.
7. Firing techniques that maintain suitable habitat functionality immediately post-burn will be utilized in all NSO nesting/roosting habitat.
8. Crown closure of stands will not be reduced below 60-70% in NSO nesting/roosting habitat or below 40% in foraging habitat.

References:

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